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### **The Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus* in Tanzania**

Britton (1980) considered this species to be only a wanderer to Tanzania, south to Morogoro and Rukwa. Urban *et al.* (1986) treated the Rukwa record as extralimital and Hayman *et al.* (1986) show *spinosus* to be a non-breeding visitor to northeastern Tanzania, clearly separated from its breeding range in Kenya. The record for Rukwa is presumably that of Vesey-FitzGerald & Beesley (1960) who listed it as rare but without further details. The reference to Morogoro Region has not yet been traced.

The earliest record I have located is that of Reichenow (1894) who mentioned this species for "Massailand and Victoria-Nyanza". Measurements for eggs are also given but it is not clear if these were from nests found in Tanzania. It is referred to by Fuggles-Couchman (1962) who considered it "Fairly widespread although rather local in Northern and Eastern Provinces either singly or in pairs." Schmidl (1982) gives a sight record for Seronera (Serengeti) of six birds in short grassland on 20 August 1972. An earlier record from Seronera for June 1962 was submitted by N.R. Fuggles-Couchman to the Tanzania atlas project.

In view of these records and its well known residence in the Rift Valley of Kenya (Jackson 1938), it is surprising that earlier authors (Elliott & Fuggles-Couchman (1948), Fuggles-Couchman & Elliott (1946), Morgan-Davies (1964), Thomas (1960) and Beesley (1972)) did not locate it in northern Tanzania during the 1940s to 1960s. Perhaps, being on the southern edge of its range, the population had contracted northwards. Lack *et al.*'s (1980) statement for Tsavo East National Park (Kenya) that it "may be a recent arrival as all WL's [Walther Leuthold's] records are after August 1972 except for 2 in 1971" could reflect a range expansion in the late 1960s.

The Tanzania atlas database now holds 39 more recent records of this species, including two successful breeding attempts. On 12 December 1991 on the eastern shore of Nyumba ya Mungu dam south of Moshi, a partially fledged juvenile with two adults was located among the short vegetation of the upper lake shore [SD]. There were other adults to the south of these birds but no more young were seen [NEB]. Previous records from this locality are for March 1986 [NEB].

On 13 September 1992, a pair with two recently hatched chicks was found on a short-grass plain some 30 km north of Dar es Salaam [NEB]. This seasonally inundated grassland lies immediately behind the sand dunes. It was unusually wet for the time of year but was drying rapidly. A week later it was reduced to a few isolated pools with the adult plovers feeding alongside the water's edge. Previous visits to this locality had been at times of high water (April–May) or during the normally long dry season of June–November. The plovers were therefore exploiting a suitable habitat that would not normally be available during their breeding season. With this degree of adaptability, it is somewhat surprising that the species is as uncommon as it is.

The recent records are given below from north to south and west to east. The Tanzania atlas grid references indicate the relevant quarter degree square.

- 3401A: 1 near Shirati, Tarime District, 15 March 1989 [VB].  
3302A: 1 south of Bunda, 29 January 1992 [VB].  
3503A: Lake Eyasi, February 1990 and May 1991 [DB].  
3503B: Lake Manyara, records for February, March, April, July, August, November and December but no reported evidence of breeding [NEB, LS, DB, PL]. Ngorongoro, January 1984 [GL].  
3304A: 2 near Nzega, 6 December 1993 [ES].  
3404A: 6 at Lake Kitangiri, 25 September 1991 [ZB].  
3506B: near Dodoma, May 1980 and February 1983 [JSSB].  
3806D: 3 on Ruvu floodplain, May 1993 [BW].  
3807C: area around Lake Tagalala, northeast Selous Game Reserve, records for February, March, May, June, July, August, October and December. A maximum of 7 in February 1991 but no evidence of breeding [BW, LO, NS, NEB, MMW].  
3308C: Lugugaa Soda Lake west of Mbeya, 2 birds on 16 July 1985 and the quite remarkable number of "2 dozen pairs" on 15 March 1986 [ES].

Although distinctive, it is often missed by experienced birders from Europe during a 'normal' safari through the northern parks and is therefore likely to exist at low densities even in optimum habitat. It is hoped that this note will prompt others to take an interest in this striking species and that within a year or so we shall have a much clearer understanding of its status in Tanzania.

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## **Request for sightings of Clarke's Weavers *Ploceus golandi***

For three years, from 1989 to 1992, I collected information on the birds of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Kenya, including the enigmatic and poorly known Clarke's Weaver *Ploceus golandi*. I am now collating all my observations of Clarke's Weaver and I would be interested to learn of any other unpublished records, especially for the period January to March, when the birds are rarely seen in Arabuko-Sokoke. Please send any details of date, number of birds and other relevant information (for example, if they were seen associating with other species, like helmet shrikes) to me at the following address: John H. Fanshawe, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, England. I will acknowledge all letters.

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